

Call Center Observations

The Students Channel used the Central Processing System (CPS) contract and the Public Inquiry Contract (PIC) for call center support to address Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) inquiries. CPS is used for FAFSA on the WEB, ED Express and FAFSA Express while PIC is primarily used for Paper FAFSA. We noted the following:

- a) CPS charged a flat rate of \$13.36 per call for call center services regardless of the length of time it took to answer a caller's questions. We noted that the call center charges for the PIC, which was managed by the same vendor as CPS, range from \$0.23 to \$9.01. A significant difference in price existed between the call center charges for the PIC and CPS contract.
- b) Based on call center statistical data relating to FAFSA on the Web and FAFSA Express, it appeared as if the Students Channel paid a very high premium for a very high level of service. For one year period (May 1999 through April 2000), the average speed of answer (ASA), which is the average time a caller waited until he/she speaks with an Information Specialist, is as follows:

ASA in Seconds	Months of ASA Achieved
10 seconds or less	6 months (May, Aug, Sept., Oct., Nov., April)
Between 11 and 20 seconds	3 months (June, July, Dec.)
Greater than 20 seconds	3 months (Jan. Feb., March)

- c) The recorded greeting of the call center did not inform callers that they can access information and make changes to their applications by logging on the FAFSA website. The Students Channel may be able to reduce reliance on the call centers and thereby reduce costs if callers were made aware of information that can be obtained by logging onto the website.

Matters for Further Consideration

We identified the following issues that the Students Channel General Manager may choose to pursue:

- a) Consider modifying the call center greeting to encourage callers to use the website. The greeting could be modified to inform callers that they can obtain certain information faster and that certain changes such as modifying the Student Aid Report can be made by logging onto the FAFSA website.

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- b) Determine if the call center flat rate is charged whether or not the caller's questions were answered by an automated response or an information specialist. If the same rate is charged, explore the possibility of obtaining separate pricing plans for inquiries answered by an information specialist and inquiries answered by an automated response. The level of effort is different and may result in a reduction of cost.
- c) Assess the trade off between level of service and cost, and determine how much cost savings the Students Channel could realize if the average speed of answer was at variable levels, such as 30, 45, or 60 seconds.
- d) Obtain the detailed information necessary to determine if a call charged at the \$13.36 rate includes only completed calls or if it includes calls where the caller hangs up before the Interactive Voice Response Unit (IVRU) comes on or before the information specialist answers.
- e) Consider conducting a thorough analysis of both the PIC and CPS call centers to identify opportunities to improve efficiency and reduce costs.